

A Summary Description of the Research Methodology Employed

Cognitive interviewing and focus groups were the methods developed to answer the research questions posed by this study. The research design was also developed to include only mothers as the primary proxy respondents. This was done because the typical respondents of the ECLS are mothers, who are interviewed face-to-face.

Each set of individual interviews and focus group contained a mix of income levels and racial/ethnic groups. The recruitment strategy for this study targeted mothers of different marital status, racial/ethnic groups, and income levels and also included mothers with more than one child in the target grade levels to assess any additional difficulties that may exist in recalling the food consumption of only one child.

Cognitive Interviews. The cognitive interviews were developed to ascertain more in-depth understanding of mothers' abilities to recall what their child consumed and over what period of time, use the food categories correctly, use the response options correctly, and describe any difficulties encountered with the questions. While modality is not being tested in this study, the cognitive interviews also provided some insight into how mothers perform in a one-on-one interviewing environment in answering the test questions.

In Wave 1, using the original set of test questions, interview participants were asked to provide their answer to each question, and then to indicate whether the question was easy for them to answer and how certain they were that their response was correct. After answering the set of questions, the interviewee was then read her answers and asked to describe how she arrived at an answer, including what things she was thinking of, how she answered for time where food was consumed away from home, and how she distinguished between what her kindergarten or first grade child consumed versus any other children in their household. The Wave 2 cognitive interviews were conducted in a similar fashion, but used a revised set of test questions that incorporated the findings from Wave 1. Each cognitive interview concluded with the interviewer presenting the participant with a \$75.00 stipend for their time and transportation costs.

The cognitive interviews incorporated some of the latest practices in encouraging respondents' to better report what their child may have consumed. This was done through the use of probes that encouraged conversations on children's activities, daily schedules and preferences, with the intention of jogging the memory of parents by recalling specific events and their relation to foods asked about in the test set of questions.

Focus Groups. The focus groups were designed to provide insight into broader topics related to mothers' ability to answer the test questions. The focus groups were used to explore mothers' understanding of the dietary habit questions and response options. The focus groups targeted some specific components of understanding mothers' use of the response options and ability to produce responses— these included focusing on their reasoning processes, their understanding of concepts and language, as well as their ability to accurately recall information.

Each focus group began with introductions and an overview of ground rules to promote discussion. After a general description of the eating habit questions, mothers were read each question, and then asked to select a response option. After each question was answered, the moderator used the guide to develop specific topics such as understanding what food items mothers think of when asked to respond to the questions, the span of time mothers believe they can accurately recall what was consumed, how they track the consumption of food by the child, contextual cues that may exist for parental knowledge about what was or was not consumed at school, and how they respond to the time increments for the response options (times a day vs. 7 days). After the two-hour focus group concluded, each mother received a \$75.00 stipend for her time and transportation costs.